

NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

Monterey, California



THESIS

**RETURNING TO THE PAST?: THE POLITICAL
IMPLICATIONS OF COMMUNIST ELECTORAL
VICTORY IN POST-SOVIET MOLDOVA**

by

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December 2001

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Report Documentation Page		
Report Date 19 Dec 2001	Report Type N/A	Dates Covered (from... to) -
Title and Subtitle Returning to the Past?: The Political Implications of Communist Electoral Victory in Post-Soviet Moldova	Contract Number	
	Grant Number	
	Program Element Number	
Author(s) Pepper, Mari	Project Number	
	Task Number	
	Work Unit Number	
Performing Organization Name(s) and Address(es) Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, California	Performing Organization Report Number	
Sponsoring/Monitoring Agency Name(s) and Address(es)	Sponsor/Monitor's Acronym(s)	
	Sponsor/Monitor's Report Number(s)	
Distribution/Availability Statement Approved for public release, distribution unlimited		
Supplementary Notes		
Abstract		
Subject Terms		
Report Classification unclassified	Classification of this page unclassified	
Classification of Abstract unclassified	Limitation of Abstract UU	
Number of Pages 84		

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			<i>Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188</i>	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington DC 20503.				
1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)		2. REPORT DATE December 2001	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED Master's Thesis	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE: Returning to the Past?: The Political Implications of Communist Electoral Victory in Post-Soviet Moldova			5. FUNDING NUMBERS	
6. AUTHOR(S) Mari Coliece Poe Pepper				
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING /MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A			10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER	
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.				
12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public use; distribution is unlimited.			12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE	
13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words) The post-Soviet state of Moldova has struggled with the challenges of economic and political development since its declaration of independence in 1991. Following a wider trend in eastern Europe, the Communist party, once discredited and even outlawed for three years, has seen its popularity soar from a 10% voter support in 1996 to 50% in the 2001 elections and has now returned to power. Peculiarities in the electoral law translated this 50% support at the polls into a 70% share of the seats in parliament, an overwhelming majority that allows them to govern without compromising and to change the Constitution at will. In any new democracy, this kind of concentration of power is a worrisome development; in Moldova, it is particularly worrisome because of the well-known authoritarian tendencies of hardliners within the Communist Party. This thesis seeks to determine the reasons that the Communist Party returned to power in Moldova and to examine the implications of this return to power on Moldova's democratic transition and democratic future and on U.S. and international efforts to assist its democratic transition.				
14. SUBJECT TERMS Moldova, Moldavia, Post-Soviet, Post-Communist, Transnistria, Transdnistrea, Dneister, Democratic Transition in Europe, Russia Foreign Relations, Russia-Belarus Union, State Partnership Program, Civil-Military Relations, Nationalities in Former Soviet Union, Romania, Romanian Language Group, Partnership For Peace, GUUAM			15. NUMBER OF PAGES 84	
			16. PRICE CODE	
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT Unclassified	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE Unclassified	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT Unclassified	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UL	

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Returning to the Past?: The Implications of Communist Electoral Victory in Post-Soviet Moldova


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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

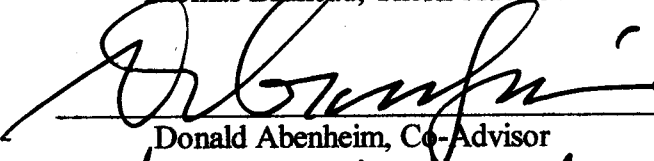
**MASTER OF ARTS IN INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AND CIVIL-MILITARY
RELATIONS**

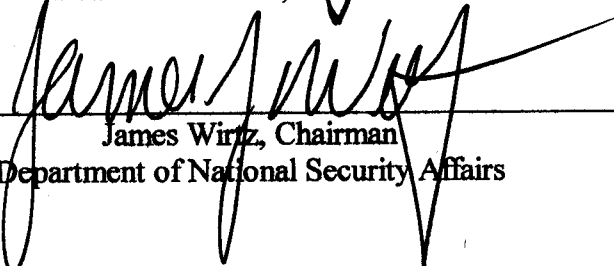
from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
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ABSTRACT

The post-Soviet state of Moldova has struggled with the challenge of economic and political development since its declaration of independence in 1991. Following a wider trend in eastern Europe, the Communist party, once discredited and even outlawed for three years, has seen its popularity soar from a 10% voter support in 1996 to 50% in the 2001 elections and has now returned to power. Peculiarities in the electoral law translated this 50% support at the polls into a 70% share of the seats in parliament, an overwhelming majority that allows them to govern without compromising and to change the Constitution at will. In any new democracy, this kind of concentration of power is a worrisome development; in Moldova, it is particularly worrisome because of the well-known authoritarian tendencies of hardliners within the Communist Party. This thesis seeks to determine the reasons that the Communist Party returned to power in Moldova and to examine the implications of this return to power on Moldova's democratic transition and democratic future and on U.S. and international efforts to assist its democratic transition.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Professor Thomas Bruneau and Professor Donald Abenheim for their invaluable guidance, support, and patience required to produce this thesis.

Next, I would like to thank Professor Gaye Christoffersen for encouraging me to delve into my research early in my graduate school experience and for providing an outlet for me to express my initial findings in her class.

And finally, I would like to thank Professor Jean Giraldo for assisting me in the initial stages of my thesis work to shape and focus my argument.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The post-Soviet state of Moldova has struggled with the challenges of economic and political development since its declaration of independence in 1991. Following a wider trend in eastern Europe, the Communist party, once discredited and even outlawed for three years, has seen its popularity soar from a 10% voter support in 1996 to 50% in the 2001 elections and has now returned to power. Peculiarities in the electoral law translated this 50% support at the polls into a 70% share of the seats in parliament, an overwhelming majority that allows them to govern without compromising and to change the Constitution at will. In any new democracy, this kind of concentration of power is a worrisome development; in Moldova, it is particularly worrisome because of the well-known authoritarian tendencies of hardliners within the communist party. This thesis seeks to determine the reasons that the Communist Party returned to power in Moldova and to examine the implications of this return to power on Moldova's democratic transition and its democratic future and on U.S. and international efforts to assist its democratic transition.

It in the decade since Moldova declared independence and began its democratic journey, the Republic of Moldova appears to have followed the evolution of most new democracies. The state has succeeded in setting up many of the necessary institutions that experts suggest all democracies must have. However, in February 2001, Moldovans elected a communist government. Why? Analysis indicates a combination of causes. Four themes resonate throughout the documents written about the Communist Party victory in February 2001. These themes are: the severe economic situation and its impact on the voters, Communist campaign appeals, citizen disillusionment with democratic reforms, and the impact of the electoral rules.

Moldova, like the other post-Soviet democracies had many challenges, both political and economic, to address while making its democratic transition. Not only did its entire political system change from a party-run state to an electoral democracy, but also it had simultaneously to change its economic system from a command economy to a

free market economy. The transition from a command economy to a free market economy was particularly difficult for older Moldovans. Prices sharply rose for food and other consumer goods, while workers salaries went unpaid, the value of pensions dwindled and the Moldovan leu plunged. Young educated Moldovans fled to neighboring countries seeking work and much higher salaries than they could hope for in Moldova. Citizens became increasingly dissatisfied with economic conditions and blamed the worsening situation on the political ineptness of previous governments, which for some citizens, especially the pensioners, caused a nostalgia that linked economic security with Soviet times. For others, it created a desire for change even if it meant the return to power of a once hated political party – the Communist Party.

Now that the Communist Party is in power in Moldova, the question that arises is exactly what kind of government is it? Is it communist in name only, capitalizing on voter desire for previous stability? Or will it attempt to reverse what democratic progress has been made and return to a much more authoritarian mode of governance? At the time of this writing, this government has been in power less than a year so it is impossible to gauge what the long-term effects will be. However, conjectures can be made from examining the party platform and rhetoric before the elections and comparing that to the declarations and actions of the government since taking control. It appears that this government is often split on where it should stand. Analysis of the recent actions of the Communist government in Moldova indicate that on the domestic level, where outside interference from international organizations is unlikely, the government will act as expected – as a hard-line authoritarian type government. In cases where international pressure, such as that from the IMF, is likely, recent government actions indicate that it will act as most governments in need of financial aid act – it will adjust its policy out of sheer necessity.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the decade since declaring independence from the former U.S.S.R. and beginning its democratic reforms, the Republic of Moldova appears to have followed the evolution of most new democracies. The state has succeeded in setting up many of the necessary institutions that experts suggest all democracies must have. Some of these are an electoral system that provides for free and fair elections, an independent judiciary, an independent central bank, the rule of law, and a civilian led Ministry of Defense. Despite these seeming successes, Moldova continues to struggle with very severe challenges of retarded economic and political development. The Communist party, once discredited and even outlawed for three years, has seen its popularity soar from a 10% voter support in 1996 to 50% in the 2000 elections, which brought it to power. Peculiarities in the electoral law translated this 50% support at the polls into a 70% share of the seats in parliament. This overwhelming majority allows the Communist party to govern without compromise with other parties and to change the constitution at will. In any new democracy, this kind of concentration of power is a worrisome development; in Moldova, it is particularly worrisome because of the well-known authoritarian tendencies of hardliners within the communist party.

Several questions of analysis and policy arise from these events. The most obvious is why did the Moldovans elect a communist government. Next, the Communist party won a constitutional majority in the parliament. What will be the impact of this new government on Moldova's democratic transition? Is Moldova going backwards toward an authoritarian form of government or are these just some of the growing pains that all post-Soviet democracies must face? Is this new government a "hard-line communist" government or is it more of a "social democratic" government? What impact will this government have on Moldova's relationship with international organizations? With accession to the World Trade Organization (W.T.O.) in May 2001 and aspirations to join the European Union sometime in the near future, Moldova is struggling to become more Western in its economic policies and practices. At the same time, its continuing ties with Russia, both economic and political, tend to confound its pursuit of that goal. What are

the implications for Moldova as it tries both to please Moscow and to satisfy the requirements of international financial organizations and the European Union?

Moldova is currently participating in the U.S. Department of Defense sponsored State Partnership Program and partnered with the state of North Carolina and the North Carolina National Guard. The National Guard State Partnership Program (SPP) links US states with partner countries' defense ministries, other government agencies, and businesses for the purpose of improving bilateral relations with the US and to promote regional stability. The program's goals include assisting partner countries' civil-military relations development in support of US policy objectives and they reflect a growing international affairs mission for the National Guard.

Initially, the primary vehicles for the program were the States' National Guards. The National Guard was chosen instead of regular armed forces in order avoid sending a provocative signal to the Russian Federation. Its core engagement competencies, particularly military support to civil authority, are emphasized ("Information"). It has since grown far beyond a military-to-military contact program, expanding to include State governmental agencies, and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and businesses. The Republic of Moldova and the State of North Carolina formalized their partnership on April 22, 1999. The North Carolina - Moldova Partnership for Peace Memorandum of Intent indicates an agreement to link these two states together to encourage and better facilitate cooperation in the areas of civil emergency operations, market expansion, cultural, scientific and academic exchanges, and to coordinate humanitarian efforts of many governmental and non-governmental organizations ("Memorandum"). The SPP is a valuable engagement tool, allowing interaction in social and economic—as well as military—spheres, and actively supports the *National Military Strategy's* mandate to *shape* the international security environment ("Information"). Today, a total of 29 countries around the world are partnered with 30 US states and one territory.

A. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

Why did Moldovans elect a Communist government in 2001? To respond to this question, an analysis must include a combination of likely causes. The leading cause appears to be Moldova's severe economic situation. Some other factors – widespread disillusionment with democratic reforms and the Communist Party campaign appeals promising to address economic problems – seem to stem from this primary problem.

Moldova, like the other post-Soviet democracies had many challenges, both political and economic, to address while making its democratic transition. Not only did its entire political system change from a Party-run state to an electoral democracy, but also it had to change its economic system from a command economy to a free market economy simultaneously. The transition from a command economy to a free market economy was particularly difficult for most Moldovans, especially for older Moldovans who rely on fixed pensions. Without the government price controls, prices rose sharply for food and other consumer goods. Salaries went unpaid, sometimes for months at a time. At the same time, the value of the Moldovan currency, the leu, plunged causing the value of pensions to dwindle. It was estimated that in 2001, 90% of Moldovans lived on less than 1 USD per day and 80% of the population live on less than \$20 (233 lei) a month, which according to the Moldovan Department of Statistical and Sociological Analysis, is below the subsistence level (Barbarosie, "Understanding").

The worsening economic conditions also caused young and educated Moldovans (mostly under age 40) to flee in droves to neighboring countries to seek work and much higher salaries than they could hope for in Moldova. Leonid Ryabkov in his newspaper article "Where Do National's Immigrate" reported that between 1990 and 2000, 100,644 Moldovans, out of a population of 4.5 million, were granted permission to leave the country permanently and indicated that many are never expected to return (Ryabkov).¹ The tone of the article indicated that the Moldovan government considered these numbers to be very high and extremely detrimental to the country both in economic and societal realms. They considered this detrimental not only because of the numbers, but because this exodus is draining the country of its vibrant, educated, and much-needed workforce.

¹ Data enumerating the number of rejected applications or those leaving unofficially was not available.

Like other post-Soviet democracies, the economic reforms designed to assist the country in its democratic transition have taken longer to produce positive effects than citizens expected. In some cases, the reforms seem to have made life even harder for the average citizen. Many Moldovans expected to make personal sacrifices in the name of democratic and economic reform for one to two years at most (Botan). The failure of economic reforms to make life better for average Moldovans in a scant one to two year period began to erode public confidence in these reforms. As Moldova's economic problems seemed to go from bad to worse over the next decade, citizens became increasingly frustrated with its poor economic performance and they had little confidence in the previous government's ability to address the country's problems. They blamed the worsening economic situation on the political ineptness of previous governments, which for some citizens, especially the pensioners, caused a nostalgia that linked economic security with Soviet times. For others, it created a desire for change even if it meant the return to power of a once hated political party – the Communist Party.

Immensely unpopular and even unlawful for three years after Moldova's independence in 1991, the Communist party in Moldova rapidly gained voter support and popularity between the 1996 and the 2001 elections. The increase in voter support from only 10% of the votes in 1996 to over 50% in 2001 demonstrates the Communist Party's meteoric rise to power. This power was magnified because electoral laws translated 50% voter support at the polls into a 70% share of the seats in parliament. All parties were required to attain a minimum threshold of 6% of the total vote to gain seats for their party in the government. The individual candidate threshold was 3%. Votes for parties or individual candidates who did not make the threshold were redistributed proportionally to parties that did meet the threshold. This provided the Communist Party with a 71% majority allowing it almost unlimited power. Of the 17 parties and 10 individual (non-party) candidates that competed for 101 seats in the 2001 Parliamentary Elections, only 2 parties besides the Communist Party received enough votes to obtain seats in the Parliament. The Christian Democratic People's Party (CDPP) received 8.24% of votes and claimed 11 seats. The Electoral Bloc "Braghis Alliance" (EBBA) captured 13.36% of votes and claimed 19 seats. None of the individual candidates met the 3% threshold requirement.

Now that the Communist Party is in power in Moldova, the question arises: what kind of government is it? Is it communist in name only, capitalizing on voter desire for previous stability? Or will it attempt to reverse what democratic progress has been made and return to a much more authoritarian mode of governance? At the time of this writing, December 2001, this government has been in power less than a year so it too soon to ascertain the long-term effects. However, conjectures can be made from examining the party platform and rhetoric before the elections and comparing these to the declarations and actions of the government since taking control. It appears that this government is often split on where it should stand. Sometimes they talk like hard-line communists but act more like social democrats, especially when dealing with international monetary organizations. Other times, namely in domestic politics, the push to return to centralized control of politics and the economy is apparent.

What are the implications for key political institutions necessary for democratic consolidation? How will the government's behavior affect Moldova's relations with the West particularly with U.S. and other international organizations? Will Moldova's relationship with Moscow advance to the point of forming a new federation with Russia, Belarus and Moldova as members? What can the U.S. (in particular, the N.C. State Partnership Program) to further assist Moldova's successful transition to a modern democratic nation-state? These questions are but a few that concern both international and U.S. organizations working with Moldova and merit further examination.

This thesis seeks to examine the implications of the recent elections on Moldova's democratic transition and its democratic future. It is a case study of the development of Moldova's political and economic institutions since their independence in 1991, and the special challenges to democratic transition that a post-Soviet country like Moldova faces. For programs like the N.C. State Partnership Program, this thesis will be useful in understanding the current political situation, especially the possible impact of the Communist dominated government on programs such as the State Partnership Program.

Sources for this thesis include: interviews with both U.S. government officials and officials working in non-governmental organizations conducted in Chisinau, the capital of Moldova in the summer of 2001; publications and documents detailing

Moldova's current economic and political situation; and current literature of democratic transition.

B. CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter II will identify and discuss important key indicators of democratic transition and consolidation. The challenges associated with democratic transition are not unique to Moldova. Although there is much literature discussing the challenges and problems associated with democratic transition, certain unique problems tend to plague all post-Soviet states. Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, in their book Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe label the challenges specific to post-Soviet states as the “legacy of communism” and identify this phenomenon as a major obstacle for post-Soviet countries to overcome in their democratic transition and consolidation efforts. This literature will be used to understand the impact of Soviet rule on Moldova's democratic transition.

Chapter III includes a brief historical background survey of Moldova prior to, and under, Soviet rule. The primary focus will be on the political and economic performance of the country since their 1991 independence and how Soviet regime characteristics affect the new regime.

To answer the primary question of how the Communist Party regained power, Chapter IV will examine why the people voted the way that they did, the electoral rules, the appeals made by the Communist Party, the electoral results and how the votes translated into power.

Chapter V focuses on the impact of the Communist government on Moldova's democratic transition and consolidation. Separate sections will examine the governmental impact on both domestic and international affairs.

Chapter VI, the concluding chapter, will summarize the finding of the previous chapters. Finally, recommendations for governmental organizations working in Moldova and the North Carolina State Partnership Program will be made.

II. DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION AND THE LEGACY OF COMMUNISM

A. KEY DIMENSIONS OF A CONSOLIDATED DEMOCRATIC NATION-STATE

The last several years have provided reminders, in every corner of the globe, of how painful, suspenseful, and downright messy the transition to democracy can be. In many states emerging from decades, if not centuries, of tyranny, euphoria has given way to the sobriety of the morning after. (Talbot 48)

A consolidated democracy undergoes “process of achieving broad and deep legitimation, such that all significant political actors, both at the elite and mass levels believe that the democratic regime is the most right and appropriate for their society, better than any other realistic alternative” (Diamond 65). In their book Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation; Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan identify five major interrelating arenas required for a modern consolidated democracy. These arenas are civil society, political society, the rule of law, a state apparatus, and economic society. *Civil society* is defined as “that arena of the polity where self-organizing groups, movements, and individuals, relatively autonomous from the state, attempt to articulate values, create associations and solidarities, and advance their interests” (Linz and Stepan 7). Examples include social movements such as women’s groups, neighborhood associations, religious and intellectual organizations, as well as trade unions, journalists and lawyers (Linz and Stepan 7). *Political society* exists when the polity specifically “arranges itself to contest the legitimate right to exercise control over public power and the state apparatus” (Linz and Stepan 8). The third arena, *the rule of law* is characterized by a clear hierarchy of laws which are interpreted by an independent judicial system, supported by a strong legal culture in civil society and the commitment to “self-binding” procedures of governance (Linz and Stepan 10). To protect the rights of citizens and provide the basic necessary services, the fourth arena, the *state apparatus*, is needed. The state apparatus consists of a functioning state and a state bureaucracy that is “considered usable by the new democratic government,” controls the legitimate use of force in the territory, is able to

collect taxes to provide needed services and make and uphold laws (Linz and Stepan 11). The fifth and final arena is termed economic society. *Economic society* is defined as a set of socio-politically crafted and socio-politically accepted norms, institutions, and regulations that mediate between the state and the market (Linz and Stepan 11). These arenas are interrelated and act together to properly function in a democratic system (Linz and Stepan 13).

B. THE LEGACIES OF COMMUNISM

Newly emerging democracies from the Soviet regime face some of the same challenges and difficulties common to many new democracies. But they also face some unique challenges resulting from the years of Communist totalitarian rule. These “legacies of Communism” have left their mark on all five arenas of democratic consolidation.

The first problem, which affects all five arenas, is that these new democracies must simultaneously make the political transition to democracy while converting from a command to a market economy (Linz and Stepan 244). In the civil society arena, the overwhelming majority of organizations making up the civil society, for example unions, cultural societies, agrarian collectives, etc., were created and maintained by the party state during Soviet times (Linz and Stepan 245). Intelligence agents and citizen informers often infiltrated these organizations which weakened its capacity to operate independently and further inhibited its ability to play a significant role in the democratic transition. For the political society arena, decades of Soviet party state rule gave the word “party” a negative connotation which created problems when new political parties, a necessary component of democratic political representation, were organized (Linz and Stepan 247).

Under Stalinism, the concept of the rule of law was totally different than that of democracies. Socialism was supreme over any law and there was no allowance, let alone a requirement for laws to constrain the party or the party leaders (Linz and Stepan 248). Next, in the state apparatus arena, a lack of clear distinction between the party and the state can disrupt the state bureaucracy’s normal functioning if the party is rejected (Linz

and Stepan 250). Furthermore, massive purging of loyal and effective civil servants (to get rid of informants) as well as the absence of any significant change can create its own problems. And finally, in advanced democracies, the economic societies have been “socially constructed by economic incentives and a complex interplay of societal norms, governmental policies, and state-sanctioned rules that regulate (among other things) contracts, the rights and privileges of private (and public) property, and banking and credit systems” (Linz and Stepan 252). These minimal components did not exist in the Soviet command economy and create a multitude of problems for the new democracies when determining how to deal with democratic concepts such as privatization of state-owned land and industries (Linz and Stepan 253).

One cannot speak of the legacy of communism without addressing the nationalities issue. The breakup of the Soviet Union birthed nations with multiple parents made up of combined ethnic groups, which had been subjected to Stalinist “nationalities planning” for decades. Rogers Brubaker, in his book Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe, described Stalin’s “nationalities planning” as *institutionalized multinationality* where the Soviet state “actively institutionalized the existence of multiple nations and nationalities as fundamental constituents of the state and its citizenry” on a sub-state rather than a state-wide level (23,27). Although the Soviets never sought to create a Soviet nation, they did attempt to create a statewide identity – the “Soviet People” (*sovetskii narod*) – which was considered supra-national rather than national (Brubaker 28). The Soviet Union never defined the state or citizenry as a whole in national terms, although it did define the component parts of the citizenry in national terms (Brubaker 29). The intent was to “harness, contain, channel, and control the potentially disruptive political expression of nationality by creating national-territorial administrative structures and by cultivating and co-opting, and (when they threatened to get out of line) repressing national elites” (Brubaker 25). The goal was to weaken nationalism by draining it of its content even while legitimating it as a form, and thereby promoting the “long-term withering away of nationality as a vital component of social life” (Brubaker 25). The unexpected results (i.e. the emerging nationalisms) of this grand scheme of Soviet “nationalities planning” finally contributed to the breakup of the Soviet Union and the effects are still being felt today.

Brubaker describes some of the problems resulting from three distinct, mutually antagonistic and interrelated nationalisms that are characteristic of post-Soviet nation-states. He calls the relationship resulting from these nationalisms the *triadic nexus*. The triadic nexus consists of nationalizing nationalisms, transborder or homeland nationalisms, and national minorities. “*Nationalizing nationalisms* involve claims made in the name of a ‘core nation’ or nationality, defined in ethnocultural terms, and sharply distinguished from the citizenry as a whole” (Brubaker 5). In the case of Moldova, this would apply to the ethnic Moldovans. *Transborder* or *homeland nationalisms* occur when a state asserts that it has the right or even the obligation to “monitor the condition, promote the welfare, support activities and institutions, assert the rights and protect the interests of their ethnonational kin” in another state and claims that these responsibilities transcend the boundaries of territory and citizenship (Brubaker 5). Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, Russia has supported ethnic Russians in Moldova, especially in the breakaway region of Transnistria. National minorities (for example the ethnic Russians living in Moldova) have their own nationalism. These national minorities insist the state recognize their distinct ethnocultural nationality and claim collective, nationality-based cultural or political rights (Brubaker 6). The post-Soviet reorganization of political space has caused tens of millions of people to become residents and citizens of new states where they are considered as belonging to an ethnic nationality foreign to the new state (Brubaker 7). This is particularly difficult for Russians who were once a privileged national group throughout the Soviet Union but have been transformed into minorities of uncertain status in non-Russian nation-states (Brubaker 7). Another problem arises from the discrimination suffered by the “core nationalities” during the Soviet regime. These former national minorities of the Soviet state are the national majority in their own nation-state – a position where they can now justify compensatory projects using state power to promote their specific interests (Brubaker 5).

In summary, newly democratizing nation-states like Moldova formed from the wreckage of former Soviet Union face many problems in political, societal, and economic reform. Political, civil and economic society were ruined or severely stunted by the Soviet system. The rule of law as known in modern democratic systems was never developed. Furthermore, the effectiveness of the state apparatus is hampered by a variety

of factors such as purges of knowledgeable and experienced civil servants or the absence of any change among personnel and procedures. Finally, conflicting nationalisms, emerging as a result of Stalin's institutional nationalization planning, wreaks havoc in many fledging democracies. Moldova suffered the same fate as many nations in Eastern Europe and must deal with the challenges and problems that arise from their past.

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III. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

A. MOLDOVAN HISTORY THROUGH 1991

Moldova is one of the smallest states of the former Soviet Union. It is approximately 13,000 square miles (just a little larger than the state of Maryland) and has a population numbering 4.5 million people. Moldova is landlocked and is surrounded by Romania to the West and Ukraine in the East. The capital is Chisinau. Moldova is an electoral democracy based on a multi-party system. In July 2000, Moldova's unicameral parliament opted to select the president rather than continue presidential selection via national referendum making Moldova a parliamentary republic.

Today's Moldova, an independent state since 1991, is the successor of the former Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR), which was created in 1940 as a consequence of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of 1939 (Fedor 107). It included Bessarabia, historically part of the Moldovan state, and a part of the former Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR), created by Stalin in 1924 to facilitate communist ideological and territorial expansion to Romania (Fedor 106). Although the ancestors of the current Moldovan people have lived in the area for centuries, Moldova's position has long been tenuous and ambiguous. Territorial disputes over Moldova have raged for centuries between Romania and Russia, including Soviet Russia and continue even today.

Moldova is extremely multiethnic. Their heritage is a mixture of Romanian, Slav, Jewish, Turkic and Roma elements. According to the Global Information System website, 2000 population figures estimate the ethnic make-up to be 64.5% Moldovan/Romanian, 13.8% Ukrainian, 13.0% Russian and 8.7% other. Its religious composition is 97.5% Eastern Orthodox, 1.5% Jewish, and 1.0% other ("Mold." GIS).

Their native language, Moldovan, is barely distinguishable from Romanian. Several switches back and forth between the Cyrillic and Latin alphabets and alternative attempts during Soviet times both to create a "Moldovan History" and to suppress Moldovan nationalism compound the confusion (King, Mold. 64-86). In addition, as with other Central and Eastern European countries occupied by the Soviets, large

numbers of native Russians were relocated to Moldova and Moldovans were deported as laborers other territories of the Soviet Union. Massive deportations to Siberia occurred in 1940, 1944, and 1949. An artificial famine created by Soviet leaders in 1946-48 further decimated the population.



Figure 1. Republic of Moldova.

While most Moldovans consider “Moldovan” to be their native tongue, Russian is widely spoken. Russian has been proposed as a common intranational language, although Moldovan is currently the “official” language of the state. Debate among Moldovans because of their various heritages continues over language and history and, most importantly, whether unification should be sought with Russia or Romania or whether Moldova should continue as an independent state. All these factors combined to make defining the national identity of Moldovans extremely difficult even among the Moldovans themselves.

1. Moldova before Communism

The Latin roots of the Moldovan culture can be traced to the intermingling of Roman colonists and the indigenous population in ca. A.D. 105-271. Other groups, Huns, Ostrogoths, Slavic Antes, Bulgarians, and Mongols to name a few, traveled through the area between the Roman departure in A.D. 271 and the 13th century (Fedor 105). In the 13th and 14th centuries, the region was under Hungarian suzerainty until Prince Bogdan established an independent principality in 1349. Originally named Bogdania and later renamed Moldova, the territory stretched from the Carpathian Mountains to the Nistru River. In the early 16th century, Moldova became a tributary state of the Ottoman Empire and remained so until 1792 when the Russians forced the Ottomans to cede their holdings in eastern Moldova (the area now known as Transnistria or Transdnistrea, see Figure 2) in the Treaty of Iasi. During the Russo-Turkish War of 1806-1812, Russia annexed the remaining portion of Moldova (called Bessarabia) and formalized the transfer in the Treaty of Bucharest (Fedor 106). During the Russian occupation years, the custom of electing a prince to govern was reinstated. Wallachia, later to become part of Romania, was located on the southwest border of Bessarabia. The Wallachians shared the same Slavic and Roman roots with the Moldovans. In 1859, Bessarabian and Wallachian noblemen elected the same man prince – effectively creating a single Romanian state (King, Mold. 27). This uniting of Wallachia and western Moldova (Bessarabia) laid the foundations of modern Romania (Fedor 106). Until the early 20th century, Bessarabians continued to debate whether to stay united with Romania, to become independent or to reunite with the Russian Tsar (King, Mold. 29-30).

1917 and 1918 were turbulent times in the region. Tsar Nicholas II and his brother abdicated in March 1917, and a provisional government was established. After the Bolsheviks brought down Russia's Provisional Government in the October 1917 revolution, the newly created Bessarabian National Council declared Bessarabia the independent Democratic Moldovan Republic. Initially the independent Democratic



Figure 2. Modern Moldova with Bessarabia and Transnistria Annotated.

Moldovan Republic was federated with Russia; however, in 1918, Bessarabia, “looking to Romania for deliverance from the triple peril of Bolshevism, Ukrainian expansionism, and political anarchy...declared Bessarabia’s union with Romania”(King, Mold. 34-5).

Neither the Soviet Union nor Western powers ever recognized the Bessarabian/Romanian union (King, Mold. 39). Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the Soviet Union tried to pull Bessarabia back into the Union, using such tactics as deploying Bolshevik agents and airdropping propaganda pamphlets (King, Mold. 51).

Many Bessarabians did not eagerly accept the Romanian union. By 1930, Bessarabia was one of the most ethnically diverse regions in Romania – home to 352,000 Russians, 314,000 Ukrainians, and 205,000 Jews (King, Mold. 44). The Bessarabian people chafed under harsh Romanian rules and fought complete integration into Greater Romania (King, Mold. 43). Converting from the Orthodox Julian calendar to the Gregorian calendar, from the Cyrillic alphabet to the Latin alphabet and even adjusting to new shop hours made the transition difficult for the Bessarabians (King, Mold. 45). Also Bessarabians were not welcomed into Romanian politics. One Bessarabian writer in 1930 commented, “We joined the Romanians...we weren’t supposed to have been conquered by them” (qtd. in King 43).

Arguments continued between the Soviets and Romanians over who was legally entitled to Bessarabia. To add legitimacy to their claim, in 1924, the Soviets created the Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR) across the Dnestr River from Bessarabia on Romania’s eastern border (King, Mold. 52). The dispute continued throughout World War II. The Soviet Union finally emerged the victor when the February 1947 peace treaty established the Soviet-Romanian border along the Prut River. The Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR) was comprised of six counties from Bessarabia and the six westernmost *raions* of the MASSR, plus a thin strip of territory east of the Dnestr River (which had never been considered part of Bessarabia) (King, Mold. 94).

2. The Soviet Period

With the Soviet Union firmly in control of the MSSR, Stalin’s “Russification” policy began in earnest. The policy’s goal was to destroy all remaining ties the population had with Romania (Fedor 107). The Cyrillic alphabet was again imposed and ethnic Russians and Ukrainians were encouraged to migrate to Moldova. Stalin’s grain requisition policy along with a severe drought provoked a famine that killed at a minimum 115,000 Moldovans between December 1946 and August 1947 (King, Mold.

96). Deportations of native Moldovans were common under Stalin's "de-kulakization" campaign. Between 1941 and 1951, an estimated 16,000 families were deported outside the MSSR, mainly to Siberia (King, Mold. 96). In the early 1950s, show trials and a public terror campaign against supposed pro-Romanian sympathizers claimed even more lives (King, Mold. 98).

While Soviet policies to suppress nationalism were largely successful for the next three decades, deep resentment smoldered among Moldovans (Fedor 108). The resentment surfaced in the late 1980s under Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. "His policies...created conditions in which national feelings could be openly expressed and in which the Soviet Republics could consider reforms" (Fedor 108).

With dissolution of the Soviet Union on the horizon came increased political assertiveness in Moldova. In 1989, the Moldovan Popular Front formed as an association of political and independent cultural groups (Fedor 109). Romanian was declared the official language, and this sparked opposition from Russian, Slavic, and Turkic minorities (Fedor 109-10). In February and March 1990, the Moldovan Popular Front won a majority of votes in the first democratically held elections, and in May, it declared Moldova's independence. In September 1990, Mircea Snegur, a communist, became the president of the newly formed Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova.

3. Independence And Turmoil

In August 1990, the Turkic minority in southern Moldova declared a separate "Gagauz Republic." Slavs on the east bank of the Nistru River (Transnistria) declared their own "Dnestr Republic" in September 1990. Despite the opposition of Moldova's Supreme Soviet, both "republics" held presidential elections in December 1991. For many Moldovan intellectuals, the separatist actions of Gagauz and Transnistria undermined the cultural renaissance initiated in 1988 and threatened to break apart the republic (King, Mold. 152). Widespread violence erupted when the Moldovan government sent approximately 50,000 armed Moldovan nationalist volunteers to quell the "uprisings in the republics." The 14th Russian Army intervened to stop the violence and to facilitate negotiations between the Moldovan government and the renegade republics. These negotiations failed, and the Moldovan government refused to join in further negotiations (Fedor 110).

In May 1991, the Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova officially changed its name to the Republic of Moldova and the Supreme Soviet was changed to the Moldovan Parliament. On August 27, 1991, the Republic of Moldova declared its independence from the Soviet Union. However, disagreement among Moldovans continued on whether Moldova should remain independent, seek a new union with Russia (CIS) or reunite with Romania. Snegur and most Moldovan political elites favored a “two-states” doctrine: maintaining complete sovereignty while cultivating strong cultural ties with Romania (King, Mold. 150).

Tension between the Republic of Moldova’s government in Chisinau and the Dnestr and Gagauz “republics” continued. Violence again erupted in Transnistria in 1992. In a cease-fire agreement negotiated in July 1992, peacekeeping forces were formed from Moldovan, Russian and Transnistrian forces to maintain a demarcation line. Transnistria was also awarded a special status within Moldova and would be allowed to secede if Moldova decided to reunite with Romania (Fedor 111).

The situation in the south unfolded quite differently. Although, the Gagauz leaders had declared an independent “Gagauz republic,” they did not seek complete separation from Moldova. A form of territorial autonomy was created for southern Moldova that empowered district councils and local government and facilitated the devolution of political power (King, Mold. 217-18). In December 1994, the Moldovan Parliament, with Gagauz leadership support, adopted a law that “granted wide-ranging powers to local officials,” endowing them with power over local resources, economic and judicial matters, and other areas (King, Mold. 218-19). The Moldovan government would maintain control over major functions such as citizenship, foreign policy, currency issue and circulation, and national security (King, Mold. 219).

To avert fear caused by the government’s declaration of Moldovan (or Romanian) as the state language, three languages – Moldovan, Russian, and Gagauz – were all made official languages in the Gagauz. The Gagauz would retain the right of self-determination in the event that Moldova’s status changed, presumably by uniting with Russia or Romania.

B. ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CHALLENGES FROM 1991 – 2001

1. An Economic Overview of the 1990s

Moldova is an overwhelmingly agriculturally based society. It has good farmland and a moderate climate but no major mineral deposits. Its main crops are wheat, corn, barley, soybeans, tobacco and grapes grown for wine production. Beef and dairy cattle are also raised. Moldova has no fuel or energy reserves and therefore must import almost all its energy resources. Energy shortages contributed to serious production declines after 1991. Some light industry exists, mostly small appliance production, agricultural machinery, foundry equipment, refrigerators, freezers, washing machines, hosiery, shoes, textiles, and sugar and vegetable oil production. Exports include foodstuffs, canned goods, tractors, washing machines and freezers. Moldova's main trading partners are Russia, Romania, Germany, Ukraine, Italy, and Belarus. Russia is by far the leading trading partner, receiving 41% of Moldova's exports and providing 21% of Moldova's imports ("World Factbook"). 40% of Moldova's industry is located in Transnistria, a region that is not controlled by the central government in Chisinau.

From 1990 until 1996, Moldova made many positive steps with its economic reforms in the areas of land and property privatization, and import and export market reforms among others. National privatization was substantially completed by 1995 and post-privatization enterprises were underway. Over 70% of homes and apartments were now privately owned and 2/3 of the non-agricultural economy had been transferred to the private sector ("Mold." USAID; "Mold." GIS). Seventy-five percent of agricultural land, concentrated in 989 large collective farms was distributed to approximately 800,000 individual farmers. In other reforms, prices were freed and export taxes were abolished, preferential credits to state enterprises were stopped, and interest rates freed. Initial success in economic reforms was rewarded when the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (a division of the World Bank Group) invested \$232 million and allocated \$135 million for eight investment projects to be initiated in 1996 ("Mold." GIS). Also in 1995, Moldova joined the Council of Europe. A 1996 USAID report noted that tight fiscal and monetary policy had brought inflation down and that the currency had maintained "remarkable stability" ("Mold." USAID).

Unfortunately, these positive steps forward could not stem the rising tide of economic disaster. Moldovan industry, prior to the break-up of the Soviet Union, was oriented toward supplying the Soviet military machine. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, an efficient conversion of the military-oriented industries to other enterprises failed. The ambitious industrial privatization program, centered on “vouchers” and aimed at giving everyone a chance to become a “capitalist,” did not improve corporate management and, in fact, hindered both domestic and international investment in private companies (Barbarosie, “Anticipated”). The privatization of key industries, namely wine, tobacco and the energy sectors, was delayed, leading to their rapid deterioration and lessening their attractiveness for investors. Even the agricultural privatization process, considered technically successful simply because of its occurrence, had a downside. The new farms, parcels of only 1-2 hectares, were too small to allow efficient agricultural production.

In 1996, the Gross Domestic Product decreased by 9% and inflation rose to 16% (“Mold.” GIS). Several factors contributed to the decline including the complicated political situation (i.e. several leadership changes in the first years following independence) and the political and military conflict with Transnistria (Fedor 132). Much of Moldova’s industrial capacity is located in Transnistria and the disruption of traditional economic ties with enterprises there has negatively affected the economy of the country as a whole (Fedor 132). Another factor that contributed to Moldova’s economic downturn was that the economy was firmly embedded in the broader structures of the former Soviet Union resulting in damage from the breakdown in inter-republic trade, sudden increases in external prices, and inflation caused by the Russian government’s practice of printing large amounts of money (Moldova retained the Russian ruble as its currency until November 1993) (Fedor 132). Making an already dismal situation worse, in 1994 and 1996, Moldova was subject to droughts, severely affecting agricultural production.

In 1997, no economic growth was recorded and little prospect for future improvement was expected (“Mold.” GIS). In June 1997, the World Trade Organization (WTO) rejected Moldova’s request to enter the WTO. Moldova began its accession process to become a member of the WTO in 1994. “Accession to the WTO requires full

respect of WTO rules and disciplines...(WTO Ministerial Declaration, May 25, 1998). To this end, the WTO membership generally requires the acceding countries to reform their economies and enhance the transparency of their trade regimes in accordance with WTO rules during the accession process” (qtd. in Ackerman 2). Although Moldova made some progress in implementing market-based economic reforms and private ownership, it was not one of the two countries of the group of 32 candidates that successfully completed their accession negotiations in 1997 through substantial economic and trade reforms prior to accession.²

Russia, Moldova’s leading trade partner, experienced a severe economic downturn in 1998, compounding Moldova’s economic troubles. In an attempt to halt the economic decline, in July 1998 the Moldovan Parliament approved a toughened budget process, but failed to include unpopular price increases. During the first half of 1998, the government collected only 55% of projected tax revenues and only 1/3 of projected annual revenues (“Mold.” GIS). As of 1999, Moldova owed 1.3 billion dollars to foreign creditors, including GAZPROM (a Russian Gas Company), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (“Mold.” GIS).

As of January 2001, the Moldovan lei traded at 13.10 lei to the U.S. dollar (“Mold.” GIS). Its initial exchange value in 1993 was 3.85 lei to the U.S. dollar. Ninety percent of the population, numbering 4.5 million, lives on less than 12 lei (\$1 USD) per day. Pensioners average only 82 lei (\$7 USD) monthly. Eighty percent live below subsistence level – that is, on less than 233 lei (\$20 USD) per month (Barbarosie, “Understanding”). The average salary covers only 40% of basic necessities, wages have lagged behind the inflation rate, and real income per capita has sharply declined. Wage arrears, sometimes by two to three months, exacerbate the problem.

Obviously, Moldova’s economy did not improve with its democratic transition (see Table 1).³ The real GDP in 1999 was 33.7% of the 1990 level. As described in the

² Moldova was finally able to complete the WTO’s reform requirements and in May 2001 was allowed to join.

³ The text provided with inflation figures listed in Table 1 did not include an explanation of the exorbitant annual inflation rate noted for 1993.

Wall Street Journal, “Moldova’s improvised, political and managerial classes failed to pursue market reforms with any consistency. That failure led to economic collapse and general pauperization, which the electorate perceived to consequences of market economics, not of the absence thereof” (qtd. in Barbarosie, “Understanding”). Moldova, a country described by the *Economist* as, a “model of correct reform and a perfect laboratory for running reforms,” became a model of stagnation setting the stage for the Communist party to gain control of the government in 2001 (qtd. in Barbarosie, “Understanding”).

Economic Indicators in Moldova, 1993–2000								
<i>Indicator</i>	<i>1993</i>	<i>1994</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>1996</i>	<i>1997</i>	<i>1998</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>2000a</i>
Real GDP growth rate (%)	-1.2	-30.9	-1.4	-5.9	1.6	-6.5	-4.4	0
Annual inflation rate (%)	2,707.2	104.6	23.8	1.1	11.1	18.2	43.8	31.3
Exchange rate (lei/\$US)	3.64	4.27	4.50	4.65	4.66	8.32	11.59	12.3
Statistics from Arcadie Barbarosie’s article titled “Understanding the Communist Election Victory in Moldova.” The World Bank Group’s <i>Transition Newsletter</i> . Source: Moldovan Economic Trends, Department of Statistical and Sociological Analysis.								

Table 1. Economic Indicators in Moldova, 1993-2000.

2. Social Challenges

Another serious problem for Moldova is the number of citizens leaving the country to seek employment elsewhere. According to Valeri Patrashko, Chief of the Bureau for Foreign Passports, the most popular destinations to immigrate are places with good economies such as the U.S., Israel and Germany, although Russia and Ukraine are also popular (Ryabkov). In the beginning of the 1990s, the most popular country to immigrate to was Israel. In 2001, Russia was the choice destination (see Table 2). Patrashko noted that in the early 1990s, Moldovans left because of the “destabilized political situation; now they are leaving because of the deep crisis in the economy...”(Ryabkov). Most of the immigrants are healthy, young, educated people

under forty years of age, who believe they can find a better life, make use of their abilities, find better work and bigger salaries elsewhere. On the other hand, pensioners, who may still claim Russian citizenship, try to move to Russia where their pension is worth much more. Between 1990-2000, 100,644 Moldovans were officially granted permission to leave the country permanently, however, there was no estimate on the number of Moldovans who have left the country without permission (Ryabkov).

Moldovan Immigration Statistics 1990-2000					
Country	Year				
	1990	1991	1998	1999	2000
U.S.	726	2,418	1,980	1,465	1,267
Israel	23,933	14,738	920	1,620	1,236
Germany	667	799	2,012	1,683	1,496
Russia	-	-	611	1,127	3,290
Ukraine	-	-	563	1,287	2,025
Total	25,597	18,218	5,909	7,700	9,881
Bureau For Foreign Passports, Moldova.					

Table 2. Moldovan Immigration Statistics 1990-2000

Additionally, debate still continues over whether Moldovan or Romanian will be the official language. This argument is difficult for outsiders to understand since Moldovan and Romanian are essentially the same language. Nevertheless, this argument has caused great emotional and even political rifts among the Moldovan people. Additionally, the question of whether Russian should be a second official language adds to the tension. Nationalists prefer Moldovan only as the official language. Russian-speaking minorities are demanding that Russian be reinstated, making it one of two official languages.

3. The 1990s – A Political Overview

Economic problems are not the only challenges that the fledging democracy must address. Despite special accommodations for Transnistria in the 1994 Constitutional Amendments, the unresolved status of Transnistria continues to be the most serious political problem. Russian troops still remain at the insistence of the Transnistrians, causing tension with the Chisinau government.⁴ The Transnistria situation has been identified by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and other international organizations as one that must be solved before Moldova will be able to adequately address its other problems (“OSCE”).

Another problem for the nascent democracy is that Moldova’s political system is perpetually in a campaign mode. The presidency, parliament, and local government were all formed at different times between 1989 and 1991. Elections at both national and local levels have never been coordinated, resulting in at least one major election every year between 1991 and 2000. The constant election cycle has made economic and political problems difficult to address since few political figures have been willing to make major decisions (especially unpopular decisions needed for economic reform) that could be used against them or their party in the next election (King, Mold. 161).

The 1994 Constitution originally designated Moldova a parliamentary democracy with a unicameral assembly and a popularly elected president. A power-sharing arrangement was formed between the Parliament and the President. The President would oversee foreign policy, defense policy, and national security issues; and he would nominate the Prime Minister. The President could dismiss ministers with the approval of the Prime Minister. The Parliament would approve all ministerial posts and the government program and would be elected by popular vote to serve four-year terms.

Six governments held power between Moldova’s independence in 1991 and 2001. The first, the Government of Valeriu Muravschi, former minister of finance, lasted from Jun 1991-1992. The government of Premier Muravschi and President Mircea Snegur

⁴ In November 2001, positive steps toward withdrawing the Russian soldiers and removing the stockpile of weapons stored in Transnistria commenced, and Russia’s support for the separatist government appears to waning. Good relations between President Voronin and Russia’s President Vladimir Putin may have tipped the scale towards Russia’s support of a Federalist Moldova.

initiated actions with international organizations. In 1992, Moldova entered the United Nations, and began working with the IMF and the International Bank of Reconstruction and Development (Gudim). Even so, the economic statistics remained grim (see previous section). In addition to Moldova's economic problems in 1992, a civil war broke out in March, splitting the country and pitting Moldovan nationalists against the Transnistrian separatists. Trouble had been brewing since Transnistria declared its independence from Moldova in September 1991 – a declaration that has never been recognized by the Moldovan government. The civil war lasted until July 1992 and ended in a victory for the Russian-supported Transnistrian separatists when Russian President Boris Yeltsin pressured Moldovan President Snegur into accepting a cease-fire and the stationing of a Russian peacekeeping force in the Transnistrian region. These factors combined resulted in the Muravschi government's demise only one year.

From the left-wing Agrarian Party, the Parliament selected Andrei Sangheli, as Muravschi's successor. In his four and half years in office (June 1992 – February 1997), Sangheli's government embarked on program of economic reform including the first program of stabilization (1993); introduction of the Moldovan Leu; small business legislation (1994); industrial enterprise restructuring (1995); free trade zones (1996); and mass privatization of state owned businesses and housing among others (Gudim). Muravschi enjoyed support from the Agrarian and Socialist coalition in parliament, making his programs and policies easier to implement. Muravschi's "plan for macrostabilization" began to work: inflation was brought under control, the state budget deficit was decreased, and the Leu was stable. The London-based publication *The Economist* called Moldova "a country of sound reforms" (qtd. in Gudim). Sadly, as the Moldovan case illustrates, merely implementing structural reforms does not guarantee economic growth. The shadow economy flourished taking with it revenues sorely needed by the government, financial capital went abroad, political favors and group interests affected government decisions and corruption grew to disastrous proportions (Gudim).

In the 1996 presidential elections, Petru Lucinschi, first secretary of the Community Party during the Soviet period, defeated Communist Party candidate Vladimir Voronin with 54% of the vote in the second round of voting (King, "Nations" 274). Fifteen parties participated in the March 1998 parliamentary elections. Based on

the country's system of proportional representation and closed party lists, only four parties reached the four percent threshold required to gain seats in the Parliament. The Communist Party, in their first parliamentary election since 1991, received 40 seats – making it the largest bloc (King, “Nations” 274). A non-Communist coalition government – the Alliance for Democracy and Reforms – was formed from the Christian Democratic Popular Party (26 seats, rightist and Pro-Romanian), the Democratic Party (24 seats, support base for President Lucinschi) and the Party of Democratic Forces (11 seats, moderately Pro-Romanian) (King “Nations” 274). However, infighting among coalition members made the selection of ministers and government officials contentious.

Three significant developments occurred on the political scene in 1999. First, during local elections in May and June 1999, the Communists increased their already significant representation on local councils and mayoral seats. The increase in Communist influence threatened the non-Communist parties and President Lucinschi and created the specter of the return to Communist power. Second, the “energetic leadership style and reform orientation” of Prime Minister Ion Sturza threatened the powers that Lucinschi already held (King, “Nations” 275). Sturza accelerated Moldova's reform efforts and garnered praise from Western governments and international lending agencies for his reforms. Lucinschi, determined to oust Sturza, quietly urged his own supporters in parliament to pass a no-confidence vote for Sturza's government, which they did on November 9, 1999 (King, “Nations” 275). A serious economic crisis ultimately resulted from the Sturza government's fall: alarmed at the imminent demise of the Sturza government and the failure of the Parliament to approve wine and tobacco industry privatization, the IMF suspended its program in Moldova on November 5; on November 8, the World Bank followed suit and postponed its structural adjustment credit agreement. Third, tiring of the Parliament's constant bickering and yearning for the strong executive powers existing in other former Soviet states, Lucinschi began to seek similar constitutional reforms for Moldova (King, “Nations” 275).

4. Sweeping Political Change in 1999-2001

In May 1999, President Petru Lucinschi initiated a non-binding referendum, asking voters to choose between the existing system and a new presidential system. The new presidential system would allow the president to serve as the effective head of

government and hold the power to name and dismiss individual ministers (in contrast to the existing system, under which individual ministers were nominated by the Prime Minister and then approved by the Parliament). The referendum results demonstrated strong public support for increasing presidential powers. Of participating voters, most opted for the presidential system (King, "Nations" 275). However, a voter turnout of only 55% did not meet the 60% voter participation requirement for the referendum to be valid.⁵

Despite public opinion, in July 2000 the Parliament voted to change Moldova's form of government to a parliamentary republic. The Parliament voted overwhelmingly to abolish the direct election for president (the next such election would have been held in December 2000), allowing the Parliament to select the President rather than the voters and severely limiting the powers and responsibilities of the President. This made Moldova the only country in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) not to elect its president by direct vote. Under the new legislation, a three-fifths vote in parliament is required to select a new president. If the required votes could not be secured for one candidate after four attempts, the parliament would be dissolved and new elections held. President Lucinschi responded by exercising his veto power to halt the legislation. The Parliament, which was then dominated by opponents of President Lucinschi, promptly overturned his veto, forcing him to sign the legislation into law or resign. On July 26, 2000, President Lucinschi signed the constitutional changes into law (see Table 3).

The dissolution of parliament owing to the non-selection of a president came quickly to Moldova. On December 27, 2000, after four unsuccessful attempts to elect a new president, President Lucinschi officially dissolved the Parliament. Early parliamentary elections, originally planned for February 2002, were scheduled for February 2001. The Moldova Communist Party (PCM - *Partidul Comunistilor din Moldova*) won a majority of seats in the February 26, 2001, national Parliamentary elections. On April 4, 2001, Vladimir Voronin was elected President of Moldova by Parliament, making him the first communist president of Moldova.

⁵ In November 1999, the Constitutional Court declared the referendum illegal citing the fact that the president may initiate a referendum, but only the parliament may administer the referendum.

Constitutional Changes, July 2000	
1994 Constitution	2000 Amendments
President elected by popular vote in two-round majority system.	President elected by three-fifths vote of parliament.
Presidential candidates must be at least 35 years old.	Presidential candidates must be at least 40 years old.
Referendum necessary for presidential dismissal.	President dismissed by parliament with approval of constitutional court.
President names prime minister. Prime minister and government approved by parliament.	President names prime minister after consulting with parliamentary factions. Prime minister and government approved by parliament. President has power to change individual ministers only on proposal of prime minister.
President can attend government meetings and chairs the sessions when in attendance.	President does not participate in government sittings. Prime minister chairs sessions.
n/a	Government has power to issue decrees.
President names two of the six justices on the constitutional court.	Government names the two justices. The other four named by parliament and magistrates.
President has power to initiate constitutional amendments.	President has no such power.
Freedom House Report, Nations In Transit 2001: Moldova.	

Table 3. Constitutional Changes, July 2000

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IV. WHY THE COMMUNIST PARTY WON

Four themes resonate throughout the documents written about the Communist Party victory in February 2001. These themes are: the severe economic situation and its impact on the voters, the impact of the electoral rules, the Communist campaign appeals, and citizen disillusionment with democratic reforms. Moldova's severe economic situation and the impact that this situation had on the majority of the populace appears to be the primary cause of the overwhelming Communist Party victory. Other factors increased the Communist Party appeal including a campaign platform that promised solutions to both social and economic problems, which was highly appealing considering the widespread disillusionment with failed or inadequate democratic reforms. Finally, the structure of the electoral system contributed led to the Communist Party's return to power. It is important to recognize that only by the combination of all these factors that the Communist Party achieved its overwhelming victory.

A. PUBLIC OPINION, PAUPERIZATION AND THE DISILLUSIONMENT WITH DEMOCRACY

The first and possibly most important factor that contributed to the rapid rise of the Communist Party's popularity was "the total pauperization of the population" (Barbarosie, "Anticipated"). As demonstrated in Chapter III, the vast majority (80%) of Moldova's population was living below subsistence level in 2001. A public opinion poll conducted in January 2001 indicated that Moldovans were extremely dissatisfied with their economic situation and that they expected to government to do something about it. In this poll, Moldovans were asked what issues concerned them most. Moldovans indicated that they were most concerned with poverty, the future of their children, prices, famine and unemployment, while concerns about health, crime and corruption ranked lower ("Barometer-2001").⁶ When asked about their income, 51.5% of the people polled responded that their income was not enough to cover their essential needs and 36% believed that their income was sufficient only for essential needs. Only 12% believed that they had sufficient income to provide anything more than basic needs. The attitude that the state should provide for the people's basic needs still exists even though over a

⁶ All Public Opinion Poll information in this section comes from the 2001 Barometer of Public Opinion Polls commissioned by the Institute for Public Policy, Chisinau, Moldova.

decade has passed since Soviet rule ended; sixty-seven percent believe that people are poor because the state does not help them enough. The combination of citizens unhappy with their standard of living and dissatisfied pensioners gave the Communist Party a sizeable social basis to cultivate support.

Because of poor economic conditions since 1991 and especially since the economic disaster in 1998, many Moldovans equate bad times with democracy, democratic institutions and democratic reforms. Their faith that democratic institutions (or at least elected officials representing the institutions) will provide and ensure quality governance, law and order, social protection, and basic rights, liberties, and standards of living has lessened since the euphoria of becoming independent from the Soviet Union has waned. (See Table 4.)

Barometer of Public Opinion – January 2001							
	Much Worse Before 1991	Worse Before 1991	The Same	Better Before 1991	Much Better Before 1991	Don't Know or Didn't Respond	
Quality of Governance	2%	3%	14%	42%	35%	4%	100%
Observation of Order and Legislation	2%	2%	10%	46%	38%	3%	101%
Social Protection of the People	1%	3%	7%	50%	36%	3%	100%
Rights and Liberties	2%	13%	13%	41%	28%	3%	100%
Living Standards	1%	2%	3%	41%	52%	1%	100%
Statistics from the Institute of Public Policy, Moldova.							

Table 4. Barometer of Public Opinion - January 2001.

Confusion stemming from a lack of understanding basic democratic principles and how economic reforms work to encourage economic growth appears to exist both among the general population and government policymakers alike. For instance, although 64% of Moldovans polled believe that a market economy is good to have, only 19% feel that privatization allows common people to make a decent living and 45% believe that privatization is a means of transferring wealth into the hands of prominent people (“Barometer–2001”). According to the *Wall Street Journal*, “Moldova’s improvised, political and managerial classes failed to pursue market reforms with any consistency. That failure led to economic collapse and general pauperization, which the electorate perceived to be consequences of market economics, not of the absence thereof” (qtd. in Barbarosie, “Understanding”). (See Figure 3.)



Figure 3. “Doctor, these pills (i.e. prescription for reform) have no positive effect...” – A. Dimitrov.

Another interesting factor is that although Moldovans profess to distrust politicians and have equated democracy with bad times, 67.52 % of registered voters cast ballots in the February 2001 elections (“Parliamentary” 3). (66.70% of registered voters cast ballots in the 2000 Presidential Election in the US.) The healthy voter turnout demonstrates support for the democratic institution of electoral representation even though a large number of votes cast went to a party that does not usually champion democratic causes.

B. CAMPAIGN APPEALS

As of January 2001, the Communist Party had the highest confidence level of any political party. Even so, only 23.1 % believed the Communist Party could address current problems. Indeed, 31.7% believed that no party is able to contribute to the process of overcoming the current crisis. Fourteen and a half percent expressed confidence in other parties, such as the National Liberty Party, the Democratic Party from Moldova, the Popular Christian Democratic Party, and the Party of Rebirth and Conciliation. The only other party to receive a confidence rating any higher than 5% was the electoral block Braghis Alliance which received a confidence rating of only 5.3%. (“Baro. Jan. 01”)

Despite the disastrous economic situation, not one of the far or center right parties (Party of Democratic Forces, Christian Democrat People’s Party, the Democratic Party, Rebirth and Conciliation of Moldova) put domestic matters at the top of its agenda (“Moldova 2001”). Although all these parties mentioned social issues in their campaign platforms, none clearly made improving the social welfare of the people a top priority (“Elect. P.F.D.,” “Elect. DP,” “Elect. CP,” “Elect. CDPP,” “Elect. BA,” “Party”).

The Party of Democratic Forces (P.F.D.) was considered moderately Pro-Romanian. The Electoral Program of the P.F.D. maintained an anti-communist/anti-authoritarian platform. They attempted to capitalize on the fear of the “liquidation of the independence of the Republic of Moldova through its dissolving into the Russian-Belarus Union, through denationalization of the population of our country according to the soviet model” (“Elect. P.F.D.”). The main initiatives of P.F.D. were: ensuring social security of the citizens; combating poverty through economic growth; law enforcement and a real, efficient fight against corruption and organized crime; continuing and finalizing the reforms in order to provide a decent level of life of the population; establishment of the State of Law and the Civil Society; respecting human rights and historically established spiritual and moral values (trust in god, family durability); guaranteeing and defending private property of the citizens; and gradual adherence of the Republic of Moldova to the European Union (“Elect. P.F.D.”).

The Christian Democrat People's Party (CDPP) was a far-right party favoring integration with Romania. Its strategic objectives were the following: fighting corruption and delinquency, alleviation of poverty, creation of conditions to ensure a sustainable economic development, support of agricultural producers and the middle class, strengthening and improving the public administration system, and integration in the regional and European economic system. The CDPP advocated a "rapid, consequent and coherent promotion of reforms [as] necessary to attain the proposed objectives and alleviate the profound crisis provoked by previous governments. CDPP shall adopt and implement economic and social policies to ensure conditions for a stable economic growth and a sustained improvement of the quality of life" ("Elect. CDPP").

The Democratic Party (DP) was the support base for Former President Lucinschi (King "Nations" 274). The DP campaign platform focused primarily on business and economic issues. Establishing a favorable business environment, observing rights on property, ensuring equal opportunities to competitors, non-regulation of the economy, modernizing the banking system, and developing a securities market and investment institutions were listed as top priorities ("Elect. DP"). Although improving living standards and education were outlined in the section titled "Social policy," it was listed after long sections outlining its strategy for Macroeconomic policy and Structural policy.

The Party for Rebirth and Conciliation of the Republic of Moldova (PRC) campaign focused on promoting through concepts and concrete actions the values of democracy and the state and utilizing the rule of law and economic and social liberties to ensure security of human rights and liberties (civil, political, economic and social), plurality, constructive dialogue, and competition of ideas and deeds, treating them as an instrument to achieve real modernization of the Moldovan society ("Party"). The PRC supported the market economy policy and pointed out that "bearing in mind the limited public financial resources, pleads for the installation of an efficient mechanism of social security, preferentially oriented towards social assistance of families, children, the elderly, handicapped persons and vulnerable layers of society" ("Party").

The overall objective of Braghis Alliance bloc, as stated in its published campaign platform, consisted of the following statements: "sustainable development of the

Moldovan State, democratic society establishment, political and territorial unification of the country, resurrection of spiritual cohesion of the nation, dynamic development of a socially oriented, free market economy, realization of real democracy, criminality and poverty eradication” (“Elect. BA.”).

The Communist Party campaign platform, which focused on solving domestic problems and the widespread opinion among citizens that life was simply better prior to 1991, translated into increased voter support of the Communist Party in the 2001 elections. The Communist Party (CP) campaign slogan “Communists in power - Order in the country, Welfare in families!” set the tone for a campaign designed to address the concerns of the people. The top four priorities were listed as: (1) strengthening the sovereignty and statehood of the Republic of Moldova, recovering its territorial integrity; (2) pursuing an economic course to revive the economy and give every individual the opportunity to work, support his/her family, study and have a materially ensured old age; (3) stopping with all firmness the robbery of the republic and the corruption; and (4) recovering the power of the people, social justice and interethnic understanding in the society (“Elect. CP”). Campaign promises included: raising pensions and salaries paid to teachers, doctors, and cultural workers; price controls on power resources, utilities, main food products and consumer goods and drugs; reinstating the health insurance system created during Soviet times; and expanding access to free medical care. The CP singled out children, pensioners and veterans for special consideration, and proposed setting up a fund to assist single mothers and families with many children (“Elect. CP”).

The difference between the campaign platforms of the CP and the non-Communist parties is rather striking. Not only does it appear that the CP took note of citizen concerns expressed in the 2000 Public Opinion Polls, but actually designed its campaign platform to address many of those concerns. The CP platform was rather short (compared to the long, detailed publications of the other parties) and concise. In contrast with other parties, the CP not only successfully articulated its goals and objectives clearly— with domestic issues plainly a top priority – but it also outlined sources for funds to pay for its proposals.

The CP platform struck a more positive tone than any of the other parties. “We are certain: Life will be fine!” “Together we will ensure order in the country and well-being in every house!” These slogans were reminiscent of Herbert Hoover’s promise to Americans guaranteeing “a chicken in every pot; a car in every garage.” That slogan appealed to Americans in 1928 just as the CP campaign slogans appealed to Moldovans in 2001.

C. IMPACT OF ELECTORAL RULES AND HOW THE VOTES TRANSLATED INTO POWER

In the spring of 2000, the Moldovan Parliament voted to increase the electoral threshold for parties to win seats in a parliamentary election from four percent to six percent (King, “Nations” 276). This increase, designed to encourage voters to form larger parties and to encourage small parties to form coalitions, effectively prevented 14 parties and movements from winning representation in the Parliament (Barbarosie, “Understanding”). Only three political parties were able to overcome the six-percent threshold and to claim a percentage of the 101 available seats. The Christian Democratic People’s Party (CDPP) received 8.24% of the votes and claimed 11 seats. The Electoral Bloc “Braghis Alliance” (EBBA) captured 13.36% of the votes and claimed 19 seats. And in what appeared to be a landslide victory, the Communist Party won 71 seats with 50.07% of the votes (See Table 5.) None of the individual candidates met the 3% threshold required to gain entry into the Parliament. This cartoon (see Figure 4) appeared on the ADEPT (Association for Participatory Democracy) Website and illustrates the difficulty that almost all the parties had in scaling the “6% wall” to gain entry into the Parliament.

The election code provides for a pure proportional system using the d’Hondt method for apportioning seats. Votes cast for parties that do not receive 6% of the votes or individuals that do not receive 3% of the votes are proportionally divided among the parties that do overcome the threshold. The result was a tremendous number of votes cast in this election – close to 30% – were not represented at all in parliament. This reapportionment of votes meant that the Communist Party, which initially won fifty-one seats according to votes cast for the Communist Party, ended up with twenty additional

seats in the Parliament, giving it more than the number of votes needed both to elect the president (3/5 majority or 61 votes) and to amend the constitution (68 votes).

Moldovan Parliamentary Elections, 25 February 2001			
Electoral Contestants	Number of Votes	Percentage	Number of Mandates (Seats)
Communist Party	794,808	50.07%	71
Braghis Alliance	212,071	13.36%	19
Christian Democratic People's Party	130,810	8.24%	11
Party for Rebirth and Conciliation	91,894	5.79%	0
Democratic Party	79,757	5.02%	0
National Liberal Party	44,548	2.81%	0
Social Democratic Party of Moldova	39,247	2.47%	0
Party for Democratic Forces	19,405	1.22	0
Other Parties and Independent Candidates	Not available	11.02	0
Totals	1,412,540	100%	101
OSCE/ODIHR Final Report.			

Table 5. Moldovan Parliamentary Elections, 25 February 2001.

The significance of the change in the electoral law was that had the previous four-percent threshold been still been in effect, five parties would have received seats in the

Parliament. Instead of twenty-nine seats (representing votes cast for parties that did not overcome the threshold) apportioned among three parties, eighteen seats would have been apportioned among five parties. The Communist Party would control 62 seats, enough to control the election of the President, but not enough for a constitution-amending majority. This would have encouraged coalition building and cooperation among parties in the Parliament.

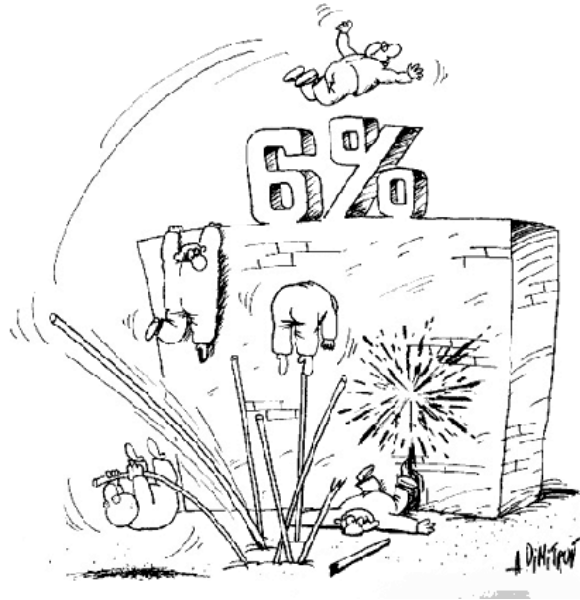


Figure 4. “The Six-percent Wall” – A. Dimitrov

The single constituency for the entire country makes it difficult to achieve regional or ethnic representation. It also frees politicians from responsibility to any particular constituency. The Law on Political Parties amended in 1999 required that political parties or socio-political groups register at least 5,000 members from six out of the twelve electoral districts in the country (“Parliamentary” 2). Significantly, this system makes it almost impossible for ethnically-based parties representing locally concentrated groups, such as that in Gaugazia, to gather enough support from other districts to register their parties, making it much easier for more widely-appealing parties to dominate the country (“Parliamentary” 2).

Despite the high threshold and the single constituency, the OSCE Office for Democratic and Human rights determined that Moldova met international standards for democratic elections, and that “Moldova’s election code provides an adequate framework

for political parties and electoral blocs to enter the political arena on an equal basis” (“Parliamentary” 1). These are the third parliamentary elections held since Moldova’s independence in 1991. As in previous elections, vote counting was completed in a transparent manner, the election results were accepted and a smooth change of power occurred (“Parliamentary” 1-2).

In summary, the factors leading to victory for the Communist Party in the February 2001 elections were indeed interconnected. However, the overwhelming victory enjoyed by the Communist Party resulted from the peculiarities in Moldova’s election system and was not really the landslide that appeared to be. In fact, almost as many people (49%) voted against the Communist Party as voted for them (51%). The “landslide victory” occurred because thirty percent of votes cast were for parties or individuals that did not meet the minimum threshold to gain entry into the Parliament resulting in twenty additional seats awarded to the Communist Party. Finding themselves in dire economic straits, a vast number of voters were attracted to the Communist campaign platform, which promised to alleviate many of their problems. Finally, many citizens, disillusioned with the apparent ineffectiveness of democratic reforms, which they equated to “democracy” and democratic parties, voted for the Communist Party. “I would rather be miserable with the Communists than to starve with the Democrats” was a sentiment expressed by a pensioner on one of Chisinau’s city streets in the summer of 2001.

V. GOVERNMENT ACTIONS SINCE FEBRUARY 2001: DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

At the time of this writing, December 2001, the Communist government has been in power less than one year. While it is impossible to predict how the government will act in detail, two general trends have appeared since February 2001. On the domestic level, the Communist-dominated government appears in certain circumstances to have acted as some experts predicted that it would – as a “hard-line” government with authoritarian tendencies implementing its policies to gather more power for itself. However, on the international level, pressure from international organizations, particularly International Financial Institutions (IFIs), forced the government to act in ways contrary to previous rhetoric and to its campaign promises.

A. DOMESTIC LEVEL

1. Civil Liberties

The U.S. Department of State, in its 1997-1998 country report on Moldova, states that Moldovan Government generally respects the human rights of its citizens, but noted that there were problems in the areas of religious and media freedom.

a. Free Press

Moldovan expert and scholar, Charles King reported in the 2001 Freedom House Report that Moldova possesses a generally vibrant and free media. Indeed, Moldova has a variety of private newspapers, television and radio stations, but the state still owns and controls Teleradio-Moldova, a major mass media outlet. According to Moldovan political analyst Igor Botan, the state has a history of using state-owned mass media to promote political events, dispense propaganda and ideology from the governing party’s viewpoint, and in limiting opposition party access to state-owned media. This has caused friction between private media outlets that advocate transforming state-owned media outlets into public institutions and the government.

The CP-dominated government did not initiate the reinstatement of the old Soviet practice of using state-owned media to promote its own programs. This practice was actually implemented by the previous government in an attempt to limit opposition,

especially the CP, access to mass media (Botan). These efforts have backfired because a former opposition party (the CP) is now the governing party and it is using the same tactics in its own favor.

However, the Moldovan Committee for the Freedom of the Press (CFP) warns of an alarming new trend by the new authorities to limit the freedom of expression and media liberties (“Voronin Says”). The CFP reported that “the undemocratic trend of Moldovan authorities is noticed in the intention of the power to return to the old practice of indicating [to] the press what and how [information] should be published...” (“Voronin Says”). The practice of dictating what information is published seems highly likely since Voronin reportedly said that the new government would “take measures to control the media if its viewpoint was different from the communists” (“Voronin Says”). The fact that members of the government’s regulatory body, the Audio-Visual Council, will now be political appointees subordinate to the governing party, instead of an independent institution as it was before the 2001 parliamentary elections, makes this practice even more likely. The CFP also reported instances of government denial of media access to information and the closure of publications that criticize the new government.

b. State Regulation of Religion

The 1994 constitution, which has received positive assessments from Western experts, provides the legal framework to ensure protection of minority rights and generally permits the free practice of religion (“Country Report”). However, a 1992 law that codifies religious freedoms contains restrictions that could hinder some religious activities. A continuing problem is the government’s refusal to register the Bessarabian Metropolitan Church, which has prevented the church from acquiring property legally. The Bessarabian Metropolitan Church is Eastern Orthodox and loyal to the Romanian patriarch rather than the Russian one. The church is a rallying point for pro-Romanian support in Moldova (King, “Nations” 278). The Bessarabian Metropolitan Church has one million members and administrates 18-20% of Moldovan Churches (“Government”). Over ninety-seven percent of the population is Eastern Orthodox (“Mold.” GIS). The government has avoided recognizing the church in fear that official recognition might weaken Moldova’s independence (King, “Nations” 278).

On June 3, 1998, when the Supreme Court of Justice rejected a request to legalize the Bessarabian Metropolitan Church, the church took its case to the ECHR (European Court of Human Rights) (“Government”). On January 26, 1999, the case was registered and on June 6, 2001, formal proceedings commenced. On December 16, 2001, the ECHR announced the results of the hearing held on October 2, 2001. The Court unanimously ruled that violations of Article 9 (freedom of religion) and Article 13 (right to an effective remedy) of the European Convention on Human Rights had occurred and awarded the applicants EUR 27,025 in damages (“ECHR”). The Court noted that because the Moldovan government had not recognized the church, that in effect, it could not operate (“ECHR”). An international lawyer, when asked his opinion on the Court ruling, stated that the “Court could not impose sanctions on Moldova” because political organizations were the only bodies eligible to do so (“ECHR”). The article further quoted a reliable source as saying “even if the ECHR judgment becomes effective in its present version, the church concerned would hardly be registered” (“ECHR”).

Another branch of the church, a branch loyal to the Moscow patriarch, has operated legally since 1991. A September 27, 2001 news article reported that the government upgraded the status of the Metropolitan Church of Chisinau and All Moldova and named it “legal successor of the Bishopric of Chisinau and Hotin and Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia (“Government”). The government claimed that state-recognition would “remove confusion in connection with the legal succession” (“Government”).

State support of one religious organization over another for political reasons violates the basic democratic belief in separation of church and state. The legal recognition by the Moldovan government of one church and its refusal to recognize another indicates state interference in religious matters. In this case, it appears, the interference was intended to ensure the government’s own political security. It is too early to determine whether the current Moldovan government will abide by the Court ruling and register the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia or whether it will appeal or even ignore the ruling.

2. State Apparatus

a. *Executive-legislative relations*

In a presidential republic, government branches – the executive, the legislative, and the judiciary – must be separate and equal, providing a system of checks and balances. Tension between branches is natural and healthy and is a characteristic that makes checks and balances work. However, in a parliamentary system the governing party or coalition selects the prime minister and in Moldova's case the president as well. The 1994 Moldovan Constitution bestows unilateral power on the Parliament to approve constitutional amendments with a two-thirds majority, essentially allowing one branch – the legislature – to control the Constitution. The Parliament's July 2000 Constitutional Amendments effectively eliminated any presidential check on parliamentary power by limiting the powers of the president and by changing the constitution to allow the parliament to select and to dismiss the president. These amendments place the prime minister, the president and the government under parliamentary control.

b. *Territorial Administrative Reform*

Perhaps the most important change the CP dominated government has proposed is one that deals with territorial administrative reform. One CP campaign promise was to review the law governing the territorial administrative divisions and to transform them back to the former Soviet-style *raions* ("Electoral – CP"). In effect, the return to the old Soviet-style *raions* will allow a "Prefect," appointed by the territorial governor to control the budgetary purse-strings of the district instead of control by locally elected officials (Botan). Currently, each individual district, through an elected "local council," determines how and on what activities it will spend monies designated from the state budget.

Critics of the proposed legislation fear a "strengthening of vertical political power" and see this change as moving back to a party-controlled country reminiscent of Soviet times – in other words, they see this legislation as a typically hard-line Communist scheme to gain power (Botan). They fear that once the law is passed, the CP will attempt to gain complete control of the local councils in the next district elections, and in effect, completely control the districts. If the CP follows through with their promise to return to Soviet-style *raions* and then is able to gain control of the local

councils in the next district elections, complete political and budgetary control of the districts and essentially the entire country will be in CP hands. Mayors, minorities such as Gagauzians, and several non-Communist political parties greatly oppose this legislation. Despite widespread opposition among citizens, news articles strongly indicate that the CP will proceed with this legislation.

3. International Financial Institutions

On the international level, pressure from International Financial Institutions (IFIs) forces the government to act in ways contrary to previous rhetoric and campaign promises. During the electoral campaign, the CP stated that the IMF was “too imperialist” (Botan). Nevertheless, the CP began cooperating with the IMF soon after it came into power.

The Memorandum on the Economic and Financial Policy of the Moldovan Government and the National Bank of Moldova, which Moldova signed with the IMF, required that several Moldovan wineries be offered as an investment tender by May 2001. The CP leaders had long opposed the privatization of state-owned wine and tobacco industries (King, “Nations” 281). In November 1999, the Parliament had delayed the privatization of potentially lucrative wine and tobacco firms a reform required by the IMF. This move prompted the IMF to suspend its program. Four months later, on March 20, 2000, an online news article reported, “[t]he Communist faction will not support the projects on the privatization of the winemaking and tobacco enterprises” under any circumstances (“Comm. Against”).

CP rhetoric reversed soon after the election. Vladimir Voronin, then the CP leader, indicated that the Republic of Moldova would continue “fulfilling all its former obligations vis-à-vis all the foreign financial organizations, including the International Monetary Fund” and would cooperate with them in the future (“Meeting”). During the week of November 5-9, 2001, just nine months after the 2001 elections, the Parliament passed legislation intended to clear the way for resumed cooperation with the IMF. ADEPT (The Association for Participatory Democracy located in Chisinau) reported that during the week of November 5-9, 2001 “numerous public officials declared that the Republic of Moldova had respected all the conditions stipulated in the Memorandum

signed with IMF and there was no obstacle in resuming the external crediting of our country” (“Parlia. 5-9 Nov.”). Afterwards, the IMF released the following statement.

Prime Minister Vasily Tarlev has stated Moldova had met all commitments stipulated in the supplements to the Memorandum signed with the International Monetary Fund. This means the republic has closely approached to a moment when the IMF, and then the World Bank, European Union, and donor countries may resume lending. To the lawmakers' credit, they have managed to meet the deadline, November 15, to adopt a whole number of important laws - on insolvency, on free economic zones, and on financial establishments. Besides them, the Parliament passed in the first reading a law on money laundering, whose importance was also emphasized by the IMF. The bill on the 2002 State Budget - which has already been passed in two readings and which foreign experts complimented as one drafted by the Government with a high social responsibility - is also opening a door for Moldova to receive new external credits. (Tanas).

Although it appears from ADEPT’s political commentary that this legislation may not satisfy all the IMF requirements, the government, rather than refusing to work with the “imperialist” international organizations, is moving in that direction out of fiscal necessity.

Analysis of the recent actions of Moldova’s Communist government, especially with regard to media freedom and the administrative territorial reform, indicates that on the domestic level, where outside interference from international organizations is unlikely, the government has acted as expected – as an old-style hard-line government. In cases where international pressure, such as that from the IMF, is likely, recent government actions indicate that it will act as most governments in need of financial aid act – that is, it will adjust its policy out of sheer necessity.

4. Moldova’s Dilemma: Relations With Russia Or The West

a. Relations with Russia

Moldova finds itself in a difficult position in regards to its relations with Moscow and with the West. The Republic of Moldova depends on economic and financial support from Russia and from International Financial Institutions and is equally indebted to both (“CDPD”). Several factors push Moldova towards a tighter alignment with Russia and even the possibility of joining the Russia-Belarus union. Russia,

Moldova's biggest trading partner, receives 41% of Moldova's exports and provides 21% of Moldova's imports ("World Factbook"). Joining the Russia-Belarus Union, is attractive simply because customs and economic barriers that exist among the three countries would immediately be lifted ("CDPD"). Moldova has been a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States, which is comprised of 12 former Soviet states, including Russia and Belarus, since December, 1991, providing a recent historical link to Russia ("Common.>"). Thirteen percent of Moldova's citizens are of ethnic Russian descent causing pressure from within, as well as external pressure resulting from cross-border "homeland" nationalism (Brubaker, 53). And finally, the CP sees joining the Russia-Belarus Union as much easier for Moldova – they merely have to ask, whereas the initiative for European integration is made much more difficult because of the high standards that the EU will impose ("CDPD").

The possibility of settling the Transnistrian conflict increases the attractiveness for joining the Russia-Belarus Union. In April 2001, President Voronin met with Russian President Vladimir Putin to discuss the possible union with Russia and Belarus. The talks, according to the two leaders, focused on economic cooperation and the continuing conflict in the breakaway province on Transnistria ("Mold. Seeks"). Putin indicated that Russia would be willing to play a positive role in helping settle the conflict ("Mold. Seeks"). Dialogue on the possible union continued throughout 2001, but as of this writing the union has not been finalized.

However, on November 19, 2001, Putin and Voronin did sign a bilateral agreement titled the "Moldo-Russian Basic Political Treaty of Friendship." The preamble to the document discusses Russia's adherence to the political settlement of the Transnistria conflict and designates Russia as the "guarantor" in the settlement process ("Presidents"). Voronin stated, after the signing of the document, that the primary point was that "Russia stands up synonymously and unconditionally for the territorial integrity of Moldova" indicating his belief that Russia will not continue to back the separatist government in Transnistria ("Presidents"). As with treaties in many countries, the signature of the president does not guarantee that the treaty will be ratified by the participant's legislature. The State Duma (lower chamber of the Russian Parliament) has indicated that it will not ratify the treaty for fear that the treaty will negate the

independence and territorial integrity of Transnistria by declaring it a part of Moldova (“Duma”). Unless the Duma changes its stance on the Transnistria situation, ratification of the Treaty is unlikely and may be a barrier to Moldova’s possible union with Russia and Belarus.

b. Relations with Europe and the West

Moldovan elites apparently see no conflict in pursuing closer ties with Russia while at the same time pursuing European integration (Ungureanu, 31). The Moldovan government has demonstrated that it is seeking closer ties with Russia while at the same time integration into the European Union is also a priority according to CP government officials. However, CP support for EU entry is a fairly recent phenomenon. In May 2000, the Moldovan media reported that Vladimir Voronin, then the CP leader, said that EU integration was a “delirious idea” and that the CP would not support “this crazy undertaking” (“Com. Par. Lead.”). The following month, the CP faction rejected an initiative introduced by the Party of Democratic Forces declaring Moldova’s intent to join the EU on the grounds that the initiative was “untimely” and noted that “Moldova should become an economically strong state” before being admitted into the EU and that its first priority should be dealing with the poverty of its people (“More Haste”).

Just one year later, and only months after becoming the controlling party in the Parliament, Victor Stepaniuc, then CP leader, made a press statement declaring that integration into the EU structures was a foreign policy priority for Moldova (“Comm. Unwill.”). On the same day as Stepaniuc voiced CP support of EU integration, the Parliament rejected a draft law to create a new ministerial structure – the Ministry of European Integration – a move that appeared to be a rejection of EU integration. CP Deputy Maria Postoico cited a lack of funds to support a new ministerial structure and duplication of functions with the Ministry of Exterior as reasons for the rejection (“Comm. Unwill.”). According to its non-CP drafters, this ministry is needed to coordinate Moldova’s preparations to enter the EU in the future. Communist Party opposition was quick to accuse the CP of non-support of EU integration for ideological reasons and of efforts to strengthen ties with Moscow.

These accusations seem to be unfounded in the light that Moldova does in fact have severe budget problems, cannot afford the duplication of functions between

government agencies and previous legislation during the Braghis government made allowances for the creation of a department of European Integration within the Ministry of Exterior structure to handle this coordination. Furthermore, later that month, the Economics Ministry began a campaign to promote the idea of European integration. It sponsored a meeting of business leaders, local politicians, government officials, media officials and diplomats based in Chisinau titled "Moldova's Accession to the E.U. Additional Information Process." The meeting was designed to gain support for EU integration and to familiarize the public with the integration process ("Econ. Min.").

Further proof of Moldova's intent to pursue European integration occurred on joining (on June 28, 2001) the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe. At the EU's initiative, the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe was adopted on June 10, 1999, in Cologne. More than 40 partner countries and organizations accepted the challenge to help support the countries of South Eastern Europe "in their efforts to foster peace, democracy, respect for human rights and economic prosperity in order to achieve stability in the whole region" ("About"). Additionally, Euro-Atlantic integration was promised to all the countries in the region ("About"). This political initiative was designed to coordinate and possibly accelerate the projects of all its partners, such as the European Commission, NATO and OSCE, the International Financial Institutions, the member states of the European Union, other Stability Pact partners such as the United States, Russia, Hungary, Canada, Norway and Switzerland along with all the countries of South Eastern Europe ("Press Handout"). It was also designed to encourage and strengthen cooperation between countries and to coordinate efforts to assist with political, economic and security integration ("Press Handout"). Three key sectors of the Pact include: the creation of a secure environment, the promotion of sustainable democratic systems, and the promotion of economic and social well-being ("About"). The regional members include Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, FYR Macedonia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Yugoslavia, Turkey, and Moldova ("About"). Moldovan authorities look to the Pact to help them overcome many of the obstacles they face in attempting to prepare Moldova for full integration into the EU ("Ungureanu").

Although admission to the Pact is a positive step towards European integration, barriers to EU membership exist. Oleg Ungureanu, in his article "The Stability Pact For Southeastern Europe – A Means of Integrating the Republic of Moldova into Europe," cites several obstacles to EU membership. First, there is not any defined pro-European stance in Chisinau or among the general population. Second, there is an absence of strategy or even a lack of interest in Brussels regarding possible EU relations with Moldova. The EU sees Moldova merely as a former Soviet republic and CIS member. However, the main obstacles, according to Ungureanu, are geopolitical in nature. Moldova is seen as belonging to "Russia's area of influence" as evidenced by the continued presence of Russia troops in Transnistria, Moldova's excessive dependence on Russia for energy sources, and its CIS membership. The EU also sees the Transnistria conflict itself as a problem that must be resolved before Moldova is considered for membership especially since the Transnistria conflict involves Russia. Russia has also taken the stance that trade relations and regulations between the EU and CIS member countries will hinder the economic integration among CIS members. Russia's stance, in turn, will hinder EU membership for CIS countries. (Ungureanu, 31-33)

To summarize, many Moldovans think a union with Russia and Belarus will be a positive step for Moldova mainly for economic reasons. However, there are some negative aspects to consider. A union with Russia and Belarus means joining with countries that have major economic and social problems of their own. It will do nothing to lessen Moldova's dependence on Russia for energy sources or to lessen the effects of Russia's economy on Moldova's. These economic ties have already had severe consequences for Moldova's economy as evidenced by the economic disaster suffered by Moldova during the downturn of Russia's economy in 1998. Furthermore, joining the Russia-Belarus union could jeopardize aid from the West because of the increased ties to Russia and future prospects for joining the EU might be severely handicapped because Moldova will belong to "Russia's area of influence" (Ungureanu, 32). In addition, joining the Russia-Belarus Union could escalate social and interethnic tensions. (Barbarosie, "Understanding"). The political cartoon (see Figure 5) appearing on the ADEPT website illustrates Moldova's dilemma of hanging precariously between Russia and the West. European integration and ultimately joining the EU would be more

advantageous to Moldova in the long term, but as Charles King notes in his Freedom House Report “Nations In Transit 2001 – Moldova,” EU membership for Moldova is decades away (274). First, Moldovan elites must realize that at the current time, seeking closer ties with Russia is incompatible with seeking EU membership and that it will be detrimental to their European integration aspirations unless major changes occur regarding Russia’s relations with the West.⁷ Next, the government must decide whether the short-term advantages gained by joining the Russia-Belarus Union are worth jeopardizing Moldova’s future EU membership even though it may be decades away. Only time will tell whether Moldova will gravitate towards Russia or towards Europe.

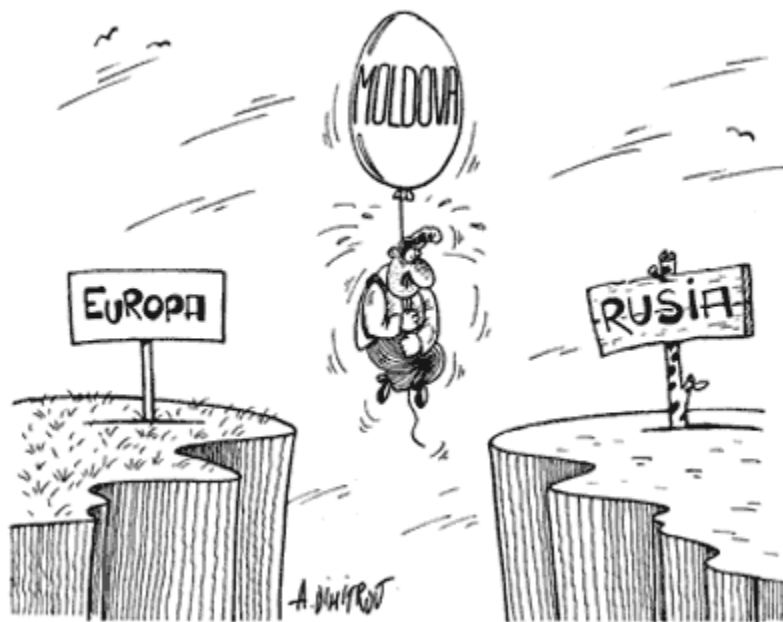


Figure 5. “Moldova’s Dilemma” – A. Dimitrov

⁷ This may prove to be a moot point in light of the changes in geopolitics occurring between Russia and the West since the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centers in New York City on September 11, 2001.

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VI. CONCLUSION

Moldovans elected a Communist-dominated government in 2001 primarily because they were dissatisfied with their economic situation and believed that the Communist Party provided the best solution to that situation. The other factors that contributed to the Communist Party's victory were the impact of the electoral rules, the Communist campaign appeals, and citizen disillusionment with democratic reforms. It was only by the combination of all these factors that the Communist Party achieved its overwhelming victory.

The implications of the Communist-dominated government on the key arenas necessary for democratic consolidation vary; however, two general trends have emerged since February 2001. The first trend pertains primarily on the domestic level. The Communist-dominated government's actions are reminiscent of the old Soviet party-state style of governance, especially on issues where no outside interference is expected. For example, the Moldovan government has demonstrated increasing tendencies to control the media and to discriminate against religious organizations for its own gain. In the former Soviet Union, governmental control of the media and strict regulation of religious organizations was widely practiced. In another example, and possibly the most telling, it seems that the Moldovan Communist Party is attempting to gain complete control over all levels of government through its administrative and territorial reform legislation. Similarly, in the former Soviet Union, the party-state controlled every level of government. However, because the Soviet Union no longer exists as a party-state backed by the Soviet Army, the Moldovan Communist Party's potential control is limited.

Secondly, on the international level, pressure from international organizations, particularly international financial institutions, forces the government to act in ways contrary to previous rhetoric and to its campaign promises because it wishes to continue to receive financial and technical aid from the West. For this reason, "a return the past" is not only unlikely, but is impossible. Without financial support from the former Soviet structure, Moldova must look to the West. The Communist-dominated government may succeed in their goal to gather power but the world has changed and the former Soviet

states have changed along with it making it difficult for the Communist Party to behave in any way it pleases. Globalization and international engagement programs have opened doors for the Western world to come into Moldova and other post-Soviet states.

Seeking closer ties with Russia may have been more of a problem for Moldova before the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York City on September 11, 2001. However, since September 11, 2001, Russia and the West have been drawing closer making even a union with Belarus and Russia seem as much less alarming to the West than before. Previously, Moldova's attempts to seek closer ties with Russia while at the same time making preparations for European integration sent confusing signals to Western governments and to international financial institutions. There is still the possibility that if Moldova continues its quest to join the Russia-Belarus Union, it may jeopardize its chance for European integration and EU membership, but not for the same reasons as before. And since EU membership for Moldova is not in the immediate future, joining the Russia-Belarus Union could have nearer-term positive implications for the economically struggling state.

With the "War on Terrorism" in full swing, regional stability is more important than ever. The U.S. has a stake in assisting newly democratizing countries worldwide. No longer just a military-to-military program, the State Partnership Program provides opportunities for interaction in military, social, and economic spheres. Interaction between partner states gives physical expression to the institutions and policies that the U.S. believes are needed to build better democracies.

In answering the question, what can the U.S., and in particular, the N.C. State Partnership Program do to further assist Moldova's successful transition to a modern democratic nation-state, one major factor seems evident. Moldova's Communist government has demonstrated that international influence can cause it to adjust its policies and even implement reforms especially to gain or maintain financial assistance. Because the State Partnership Program is primarily an engagement tool, it does not offer monetary assistance to partner countries. However, other incentives, such as assisting the state-to-state exchange between in civil-military relations, industry, agriculture and

business, can be utilized to encourage Moldova's government to continue its democratic reforms.

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APPENDIX. HISTORICAL TIMELINE⁸

1526	Bessarabia (Moldova) part of the Ottoman Empire.
1787	Girai Khanate established by Ottoman Empire for the former Khans of the Crimea.
1791	Eastern Moldavia annexed by Russia.
28 May 1812	Bessarabia annexed by Russia.
15 Dec 1917	Moldavian Democratic Republic proclaimed by the Council of State (<i>Sfatul Teriy</i>).
24 Dec 1917	Provisional Revolutionary Committee of Southern Region founded by Bolsheviks (Communists) in opposition.
14 Jan 1918	Front Committee of "Rumcherod" [Central Executive Committee of Councils of Workers', Soldiers' and Sailors' Deputies Romanian Front, Black-sea Navy and Odessa. Odessa Region] proclaimed itself the supreme power in Bessarabia.
18 Jan 1918 - Feb 1918	Ukrainian (Ukrainian People's Republic) intervention.
19 Jan 1918 - Mar 1918	Romanian occupation.
6 Feb 1918	Council of State proclaimed independence from Russia. (Moldavan Democratic Republic)
9 Apr 1918	Council of State accepted a Romanian protectorate.
10 Dec 1918	Incorporation into Romania completed.
11 Oct 1924	Moldavian A.S.S.R. established in the Ukrainian S.S.R. by Soviet Union.
28 Jun 1940	Bessarabia incorporated into the Soviet Union (from 2 Aug 1940 Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic).
25 Jul 1941 - 22 Aug 1944	Reincorporation into Romania.
15 Sep 1947	Reincorporation into the Soviet Union (de facto 1944).

⁸ Ben M. Cahoon.

23 Jun 1990	Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova
23 May 1991	Republic of Moldova
27 Aug 1991	Moldovan independence declared.
1 Dec 1991	Dneister [Transnistria] declares independence from Moldova (not recognized).
25 Dec 1991	Independence effective (dissolution of U.S.S.R.).
7 Mar 1994	Referendum rejects union with Romania.

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